FOOL'S GOLD

BY JOHN GOULD FLETCHER

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MCMIII

Rejoice in misery, solitude, and misfortune, for out of these comes strength, courage and deliverance.

IN MEMORIAM

Mes "Poetes Maudits":

Tristan Corbière (1845-1875).
Comte de Lautréamont (1846-1874).
Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891).
Jules Laforgue (1860-1887).
G. Albert Aurier (1865-1892).
John Millington Synge (1871-1909).

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Part I

THE SEARCH

PRELUDE.

LET me have strange new song so that my soul
May not grow sad and cold
By the ashes of the old;
Let me have strange new song to rhyme and roll.

Let it be fair or base,
Even as this life is;
Commingled woe and bliss,
Changing as change the pulses' steady race.

Enough for me to sing,
And gather with my sheaves
Dead roots and bitter leaves;
Let others know the joy—if joy it is—
That fame can bring.

Let me have strange new song:
On with the rhythm of life,
I leap nor fear the strife;
My soul is dancing, dancing, all day long!

CONTRADICTION.

THE earth holds in its being day and night,
And, some think, there are three:
Light, darkness, which we see,
And one more thing behind which keeps from sight.

Seeking, I found not: dreaming, could not know:
But through me runs the flow—
Like two great separate seas—
Day, darkness, with their storms and ecstacies.

Therefore look not for wisdom in these lines,
Nor combat with some wrong,
For he needs not a song
Nor day, nor night, nor earth, who wisdom finds.

I sing both good and bad: let contradiction share!
If there be truth behind
I do not greatly care;
At any rate, I know it is not in my mind.

The earth's to choose from: what man could refrain?
Let me praise day and night
Or hate them both as blight,
But let me strike the lyre once and again!

HOPE.

Hope flashes on some men
While in the dark they grope;
It blinds them to their pain :
To me all things are hope.

Hope will not let me rest;
But like some dawn of storms
Buffets me, as to test
My spirit's strength in arms.

Hope lures my leaping pride
Some steeper crag to scale,
And like a silent guide
Keeps every counsel well.

Hope, letting me not grow
Gross, cheap, and well-at-ease,
Urges my soul to go
Where new thoughts burn and freeze.

Hope, like a lash of steel,
Scars my back every day
With many a well-aimed wheal:
Hope leaves me weak and grey.

Hope, for myself alone,
And through myself, to all:
A sword for those who groan,
A crown for those who fall.

AMBITION.

Swift to-morrow with my sword
Will I magic kingdoms win:
Forests penetrate within,
Conquer castles at a word.

All the splendour of the sea
Shall the waves cast in my lap:
Songs from islands of good hap
Shall the breezes blow to me.

Great adventures will I prove,
Till, gem-purpled, she of dreams,
Sailing down far tropic streams,
Claims me as the slave of love.

Then I'll fall, who once was strong:
But I'll stand and smite the strings,
And on universal wings
Pass, amid a storm of song.

DRUNKENNESS.

In the night dim
Shadows slim,—
Men—pass by:
Let them pass!
Lift the glass;
Drunken am I!

In the night dark,
With spark on spark
The cities blaze:
In dizzying flight
I dance to the light,
To wine my praise!

In night or day,
Sad or gay,
Low or high:
Weep if you will!
I am laughing still;—
Drunken was I!

DISCONTENT.

I GRUMBLE over life:
I grumble over meat:
I carp at everything,
For I find grumbling sweet.

Like to a pinch of salt
To me is bitter strife,
It gives, if nothing else,
A fiery thirst for life.

You think it wrong to squabble?
What would you have life be?
'Tis either endless struggle
Or endless misery!

I grumble over life,
For my nature is to grumble:
I do not feel at all
Happy in being humble.

And as for those who think
Me silly so to do,
I laugh again at them:
And then they grumble, too!

FAILURE.

In all things have I failed:
And all I planned to do
Has come to nothing, too;
In naught have I prevailed.

All has illusion proved,
But will to bear the weight
Whate'er it be, of fate,
And to endure unmoved.

To think I could have been
Anything else but low
Is folly, and I know
I am most weak and mean;

Yet there are some who sigh
At my unchanged despair,
And whisper softly, "There
But for God's grace go I."

No honour then your due!
If God did all, why then
You are the least of men:
Him do I thank, not you;

Your mockeries on me cast;
You mock a moment long!
But I keep sound and strong
My dream until the last:

My soul it is, my breath;
A fool, I shall not sell,
But leave it in my will
A last bequest to Death.

Palaces and far pavilions
Beam upon the night.
(My soul resumes the thread of her ancient dream.)

Ages ago,
There was dancing and wine
In many a summer palace by the sea:
A swift kiss and a tinkle of anklets of gold,
Where now the poppy flares unaffrighted by the sun,
And the dandelion shatters its greyish globe of seeds.
(My soul is weaving faded tapestries.)

Long afterwards,
There were the musk-paved gardens that you loved,
And fair halls faintly jingling with jade bells.
But the swift feet of the dancer
Still passed as through the centuries forgotten,
Still beat and hesitated not at all.
(Long, long is the thread of my dream.)

But now to-night,
I see the lights of far-off palaces.
Beyond them is the desert filled with ruins.
There are many stories I have long forgotten,
For within those palaces every night a dancer
Dances, and they beam upon the night.
(My soul resumes the thread of her ancient dream.)

FREEDOM.

THERE's only the dark and sodden moor,
And the grey sky over me;
These are all my possessions,
And of the rest I am free.

Better the thrush in the hollow,
Or the lark in the sky to be,
Than a man among men to wander
And their tragedies to see.

KNOWLEDGE.

Encyclopædiac folios
Have I searched, knowledge to find,
Till my eyes became half-blind,
And a wart grew on my nose.

Still, my quest was not in vain;
The goal I reached, of all my strife:
I can tell in four lines plain,
All that knowledge speaks of life.

Chance has woven hopeless fate:
Nothing alters, naught is new:
Joy and pain and love and hate
In a vain circle 'round pursue.

SORROW.

WHAT shape can I build of rhythm or melody,
To embody my vague and shadowy sorrow,
My passion for twilight, for faded hours,
Old thoughts and seasons, that trouble my soul?
Can I pour forth gorgeous words in a torrent of melody,
Or with a shy simplicity hint at my grief;
Can I carve pale cloudy shapes from vast mountains of marble,
Or paint some low-vibrating twilight moment?
Or can I wake in the keys the sad, broken, sobbing arpeggios;
The solemn chords, the melodies darkly recurring,
Tunes of a time gone by, to unburden my soul of its evening,
Its clouds, its chilly breezes,
Its cypresses, its pools unquietly shivering,
Its mossy urns, its statues shattered,
And its hillsides etched bleak, bare, and solemn in the grey space of western sky?
Alas, for all these that are vain; yes, even the magic of music,
Creating the pulses of passion, only hints at the infinite longing
Of a sorrow like mine alone with unattainable beauty
Above it, and dead dreams as broken toys at its feet,
And the evening about it, and the stars thick as tears in the sky,

While the day, it knows, is long past, and even day's memory fading
As the night, eternal and changeless, folds it about forever.

LONELINESS.

I WAS offered the wine;
I refused it—the fool!
Now I drink bitter brine
In solitude's school.

When kisses were offered
I waved them away,
Who once spurns the proffered
May nevermore play!

In vain was I called
To Youth's table of bliss;
Now I fast on the salt
Of sharp loneliness.

Afar from a port,
I must wander to test
The storm-gusts that snort
On the sea's savage breast.

Years have fallen like leaves,
Age is creeping more near;
He whom no hope reprieves,
What fate need he fear?

Not a glimmer of light
On the black scene of care!
I'm alone with the night,
And alone with despair!

Let howl the cold sea;
Let the storm fill my soul;
Let the rudder bang free,
And the night be my goal.

ATTAINMENT.

At last I sit beyond all joy and hope;
Beyond all fear and sorrow now I rest.

The sky is grey, evenly diffused the light,
There is no single shadow anywhere.

I am alone, and silence is about me:
I listen, listen, to that silence long.

And in its inmost depths I catch a murmur,
A pale, faint whisper, echoing evermore:

"All is now as it was, all that must follow
Must be ever the same, down to the end.

Chance, blundering, built on nothingness the mansions
Of life, which into nothingness must fall.

Then weary not your soul with passing sorrows
But hear the words of everlasting joy:

Your sense will sink in sweet annihilation,
Abide until that time of perfect peace."

FAITH.

O God, beyond my spirit's uttermost dreams,
Beyond the most intuitive glimpse of art,
Beyond all whirling, vague, mist-shrouded streams,
Of Consciousness—but yet in me—Thou art.

I am a trial-shape to test Thy worth:
A slight wave-bubble, hastily snatched away,
Thou may'st destroy my paltry chance of earth,
But yet, O God, I thank Thee for to-day.

Wretched and loathsome are man's sufferings,
Weak is my struggle with the encompassing dark:
But yet within my heart a strange joy sings,
And man yet fiercely cherishes life's poor spark.

O God, who hast created me in might
Faith to proclaim, strong faith in life and death:
Although there fall on me the sword of night,
I praise Thee, in my proudly vehement faith.

BEAUTY and power and might
To Thee are hateful blight:

The tiger has all three,
So chained by man must be:

A wretched ape half skinned,
Diseased and base of mind,

Now hast Thou set above
Creatures of health and love!

Cattle and dogs allowed
This sway: as slaves they bowed

Their heads to Thy decree,
But the tiger yet is free.

O Thou, Who hast Thy Will
Through torture, threat and ill;

I, pitiful babbling mite,
Thou "lovest, yet dost smite,"

I ask the tiger's wage:
Grant me the bars, the cage,

The misery, and the fate,
So that I free may hate

Thee and Thy Works for aye:
So that I free may die,

Not an enlightened clod,
But a brute without a God.

Take back then what was given:
No soul I want, no heaven!

For I'd be rather naught
Than in Thy meshes caught,

The last slave of Thy plan,
Thy vilest creature, man!

INDIFFERENCE.

No more the crested wave of joy for me,
The gloomy trough no more:
Smooth, bare, and glittering is the endless sea
Without a glimpse of shore.

On the horizon dim and far away
Becalmed lie many sail;
I watch them passing through the arid day,
While I await the gale.

I am a mariner without a chart,
Or any coast to find;
A merchant with no cargo for the mart,
I steer a voyage blind.

My sails are rent and ribboned, and my mast
Leans crazily askew.
Nothing that floats on brine but has surpassed
My speed, as if it flew;

Meanwhile my keel is rotten, for 'tis old,
Gapes open to that wave,
Sunlit but grey, burning but bitter-cold,
My master and my grave.

Must I yet strive to keep afloat above
The appalling, unplumbed deep,
Which never lights with any glow of love
And never wakes from sleep?

Some day I'll grant the waters' utmost will,
Open a breach to sea,
Of bitterness unchanging take my fill,
And break the mystery.

SIN.

I SHUDDER, and am revolted at the thought
Of this vile body, from which there is no escape:
Leprous with sin, corrupt and putrefying,
Stained, broken, with the efforts I have made
To outdo folly with folly, and to stand
Over all ages, a vast mockery.

Could I but fly from out this cage of flesh,
This instant would I do it: even death
Rejects my plea and with disgust turns back,
From such a carrion-prey: and for my songs,
They are so evil that Shame smiles at them.

There is naught left, then, but to hide myself,
Content, in the deaf desert of my Pride,
And worship there my image which is cracked
From crown to base. So Thy last punishment
O God—or Devil—is, I cherish Hell!

RESIGNATION.

I ASK you not, O soul of mine,
To be content, for that is vain:
I only ask you to resign
Yourself to pain:—

To make the daily count of rhymes
No goal, but only a poor means
Whereby you waste the last of Time's
Unchanging scenes.

I ask you, bear the nothingness
Of effort, even as earth is hurled
Against the night which grows no less,
Despite our world.

Think of the million others who
In darkness came, to darkness passed;
Who, hopeless, toiled; nor deem that you
Must be the last.

Think of the endless ages gone,
The work made vain, the floods of tears
That altered nothing, and be one
With all those years:

Think of the fate that burdens all,
And for an end that none can tell:
And if with all the rest you fall
Complain you well?

Be silent. Bear your baleful weight
Like a poor porter-slave in chains
Who strives, unquestioning of fate,
While strength remains!

Since grey must be the brightest light
Of sun within this world unblest,
In the vain struggle spend your might,
And creep to rest!

DESPAIR.

STARS great and lonely,
Let me be one of you,
To burn myself to ashes in the night.

Pain, hate, and solitude have made
A banal tragedy, ill-played,
Where I am audience and actors, too:

I taste each moment the bitter poison of life,
The irony of time,
The foolishness of fate!

All of my effort is worn out:
Let me again a child become,
That I may taste this old despair anew.

Stars burn blue and gold:
I rush, a falling star,
Downwards, from the night into the night.

ENNUI.

Bored with all earthly things am I:
With men-machines that grind
Through long grey hours of misery,
Yet leave no trace behind;

Existence stirs up barren strife,
Though it be nothing worth;
Gold is the key that unlocks life,
And Art is done to death.

Yet still I want I know not what,
And sing, but for what reason,
I cannot tell: with me, I fear,
'Tis ever silly season!

TO DEATH.

O DEATH, slow groundswell of my thoughts' wild
tide,
Again and again your cold fascination returns:
Again and again, rejecting all things that are,
Vainly I cast myself on the hollow void.

O Death, yon lonely god of rites abhorred,
For you I wait, being a lonely man:
I have spent my life in vain prayer at your gates,
Regretting not, nor feeling any sorrow,
If even so in my death I may pray in vain for life.

IN SICKNESS.

O DEATH, come soon, soon, soon:
Hasten to end my pangs
With the poison of thy fangs:
And let it be as a boon!

Thy body I fasten to mine,
Thy lips I set to my lips:
Desiring the tragic sign
Of an ultimate eclipse.

O corruption, hasten fast!
Come, worms that will gnaw me whole!
My body has broken at last
'Neath my black and bitter soul.

ASPIRATION.

STARS, stars above, glittering, glittering, glittering;
Stars every clear night in the same place on high:
Stars afar, very old you are, yet deathless:
Are you the spheres I must go to when I die?

Stars of my soul, that gaze in my eyeballs,
Strange silent companions steadily signalling,
Some day perchance among your flame-walled cities
I shall pass, while earth moves on from spring to spring!

What fresh adventures shall I find among you?
What joys, what loves, what strange and dreadful wrong?
What new sorrows will assail my spirit,
Filling it full with the wild revolt of song?

Stars, stars above, glittering, glittering, glittering;
Stars every clear night in the same place on high:
Stars afar, very old you are, yet deathless:
Are you the spheres I must go to when I die?

AT THE GATE OF DEATH.

Dying to live, I have only lived to die,
A poor bedraggled mock of men, my brothers;
Now my heart shaken spills its agony
In thick, slow drops; now the vague twilight gathers
Upon the motionless tree-tops standing high
Within the cemetery of my hopes:
Darkness creeps slowly down drear upward slopes
That lift into the chill and ashen sky.

No soul has climbed with me life's stony hill:
No soul has joined me at the wayside rest:
No soul companions me, now death must fill
With horror and anguish my breath-struggling breast:
I have suffered in solitude from now, until
This moment: now once more I cry in vain
My utmost pulsing agony of pain:
No word, no echo: earth and air are still.

IN THE HOUR OF DEATH.

I HAVE been dead before. What knew I then
Ere I was born into the world of men?
Since all things back to whence they came return,
What fear of Death, then, do I now discern?
Though parted from him long, we still must be
As friends that once again each other see!
Oldest of all he is: My hand I rest
In his, and go: the oldest friend is best.

DEATH.

I am maddened with wine and sorrow,
I am scorched with love's fiery breath:
And now a whisper runs through me,
"Hasten, for I am Death."

I desire many new songs to fashion,
Songs for the spirits of men:
But ever that shudder repels me:
And there is no singing, then!

I dream of the world rolling headlong
Down ages, with my hand to steer:
But all that I see is—that phantom!
Yes, he is here!

I have toiled: I have tasted men's pleasures:
I have breathed with their common breath.
And now there is only one song in my heart—
The iron pulse of death.

GREATNESS.

If I am great at all, 'tis not because
I have more gold or health than other men,
Or know more joy, or more adventure gain,
Or keep more proudly virtue's lofty laws.

I am the very least of earthly things
Where all these are in question, for I know
Only the least of things may lightly go
Over the gulf on beating, whirring wings.

But I am great, and greater will abide,
Because I do not reck of gain or loss:
I prize all things, and naught to me is dross,
I dare the treachery of every tide.

Part II

THE DISCOVERY

RECOVERY.

At last the winter's grey death-vultures
From my harsh land of graves have flown:
Now in my soul a pallid springtide
Sits feebly in the pallid sun.

The silent sphinx of song-creation
Broods on renewal: and my heart
Beats warm as it did once, ere sorrow
With spiky thongs hacked it apart.

But yet I feel in fresh grass darting
Slim arrows that quiver to a breath,
Remembrance of those vaults of horror
Through which I walked last year with death.

ACHIEVEMENT AND FAILURE.

THE achievements and the failures that time brings
forth in me
Are as the withered fruit of a thousand dead
despairs,
Or the bleeding life of a million tears renewed.

IMPOSSIBLE SILENCE.

OTHERS may seek the tumults of the day,
I am in love with silence. Long ago
I, too, dreamed dreams of colour, movement, sound,
Of rhythm broken yet constant as the sea.

But now the beautiful still grey haze has grown:
The canvas where I draw myself the shapes
That please me, but displease all other men:
While solitude and silence seem the best
Of all earth's gifts to my wayward, sullen mood.

Alas, that they are rarest! Why we wish
Whatever is not, always puzzles me:
Perchance if we could gain it, we might rest:
But in our imperfection, rest is vain:—
Perfection but the idle hope that makes
Endurable, though void, the weight of days.

THE WEARY HOURS.

Now I have had my day,
And all my songs are sung:
A mirthless crew were they,
With never a laughing tongue.

Still pass the hours' swift feet;
But not a note they raise,
Nor chorus bitter-sweet
For winter's greyest days.

My hours, why cease from talk?
See you some dawn aglow?
"No: but we yet must walk
Or we would faint with woe."

RESOLUTION.

Life mocks at me and I mock back at life:
Life sobs and I repeat its cries of pain,
Life rages and I swell with empty strife,
Life revels and I turn to dance again.
But wherefore should I echo joy and pain
And dangle at the puppet strings of strife,
Why ring the changes on old tunes again
To satisfy that weary tyrant, Life?

No, I will either break my lyre, or fill
My verses with disgust and scorn of days,
Yet hold the idle dream in secret still
Of song too deep for rhyme, too high for praise:
So that, if rarely, I may feel the thrill
Of joy eternal and the deathless bays.

PERHAPS.

Some day the goal we seek
Will crown this quest of ours,
We will creep back, worn and weak,
From the desert to the flowers.

We will ask no aim of life,
And so will gain a time
Of peace apart from strife,
And joy, and joyous rhyme.

And we will never know
How happy we are, there:
How time moves fast or slow,
How foulness makes life fair.

For we will merely—play!
And sweep away from sight
The riddles of the day
And the answers of the night.

REVOLT.

I cannot be at ease which way I take,
I have been chained in feebleness too long:
And so I cry a famished cry and strong,
Come clouds and from your sides let thunder break.

Shatter the cities and the fields uproot:
Either destroy me or destroy this hell,
It matters not, but break at least the spell
Of this fair-seeming summer without fruit.

I will not rest in safety, nor apart:
I must share life with all men, or life must
Rend song to atoms and my dream to dust.
God, let Your lightning pierce me to the heart.

WHAT MATTER?

WHAT matter if we live life full and just,
Taste grief but little ere we pass to dust:
Or if we use each moment we have known
On death to contemplate, for death to groan?
From death to life and back to death we fly,
Does any one count the insects when they die?

ENGLAND.

I WANDER far from lands of life;
I part from friendly smiling men:
Within my heart rages a strife
Not to return—but all in vain.

For I am poisoned with the taint
Of a sick, fat, and squalid land;
Why need I rage against restraint?
I wear its very brand.

I come back to a vast, dull place
Where automatic mannikins,
Each with the self-same stupid face,
Pursue their trivial sins.

Their brains with smoke are dry and salt;
They chatter phrases, sweet and trite:
No feelings ever made them halt
Before a hate 'gainst man and light:

They think as think all other men;
No one this custom dare deny:
He who does otherwise is slain,
Or set a laughing-stock on high.

They buy all things from birth to death,
And with that gold Bull which they bear
They turn to slaves men's souls and breath,
Yes, touch the earth and leave it bare.

From servitude's life-lusty mass
They, bloodless, suck the strength away;
Brewing their ancient poison-gas
That hides their doom another day.

Sick, silly, sleepy, they move on
Through the grey suns that rise and fall;
They do but that which must be done,
And one grave hides them all!

VANITY OF VANITIES.

LIFE is the pitiless progress from the womb
Unto the grave that closes all our care;
A cage of flesh, a dark and dusty tomb
Where aspiration sinks beneath despair.
A growing grey in body, soul, and mind:
A growing vile in spirit, flesh, and thought:
A lash that speeds us 'round a circle blind:
A bond we cannot 'scape, a bond unsought.

Work is the only means by which we live:
A servitude that earth has fixed us in,
A strife for food to live and further strive,
A punishment for sin, itself a sin.
A balance-sheet in life's bankruptcy filed
Where, on the credit side, stands "Wages due";
But on the other, 'mid the debts up-piled,
"Item: one life lent: I cannot renew."

Love is the body's vengeance on the soul:
A debt contracted for before our birth,
A dark pitfall before a shining goal,
It dulls our days and makes our dreams grow mirth,
For when we seek this phantom, as of old,
Blind to the treachery of ages past,
We fall, and there is nothing but the cold
And silent laughter of the void at last.

Art? But what then is the bright dream of art?
Only the hope discredited of a heart
That broke when it saw heaven, hell, and earth
To be alike vile and of little worth.

It is a madman's poisoned, dangerous dream:
An imbecile's delight, an idler's gain:
A chance of gold to some with least of strife:
To most, an idle sacrifice of life.

Progress? 'Tis the new-fashioned Purgatory-stair.
On it we climb and climb, yet never see
Within the blue the fountains' ecstasy
Of Paradise: it is a sermon rare
Of good rewarded, preached about a fire
Mid-winter nights, when all is cold and still;
When feeling's numb and dead is our desire,
And we can only strive through conscious will.

God is the curious chance of fate that made
The saint's grief and the devil's joyous leer.
Woe conscious stays, but joys unconscious fade:
Darkness is more each day and more each year.
Old age and pain and death for all our woes
He gives: a blissful sleep, a waking drear,
Although His purposes do not appear,
He knows about it all? Who knows He knows?

Success is nothing more than being held
By others' efforts higher to the sun.
It is a good life and a bitter one,
Since once for all the illusion is dispelled
That anything you do can ever rise
By what you gave it: though you flame desire,
Your ego falls from out the vacuous skies
Until it grovels, scoundrel, in the mire!

Idleness is a chance for evil thought:
It is an opportunity for truth
To offer you her favours all unsought;
And spurn them as you will and show no ruth,
The horrible hag returns to the attack.
She shows how loathesomely all things are done:
She touches you and makes your body black:
She racks your soul: she muck-defiles the sun!

Death is of all these things the crowning jest.
A merchant, whom we offer suffering,
Joy, hope, dreams, all our heart-beats blest, unblest,
Wealth, fame and life: yea, our poor lives we bring
To him, so he may sell one drop of bliss
Which fades not, but endures; and, while we wait,
Kneeling to him, each one expecting this,
He knocks our heads in with his bludgeon great.

Joy is the vanity of vanities,
Our grotesque crowing-over our defeat:
A snare for all the foolish and the wise,
A mockery to all men, bitter-sweet.
We watch folk laughing at us, while our eyes
Bleed in dumb pain; but when we laugh as well,
Turning the joke upon them, then the prize
Of vanity is ours, and *they* taste hell!

So all things here are vain, even vanity!
And vanity is vainest of them all.
And as they were, and are, they must still be,
Until the worlds break and the stars do fall.

There is nothing new in vanity under the sun:
Though we should choose, or turn us from the strife
It matters not, for all things must go on
Till death slays death and vanity and life.

"TRUTH DIES——"

Truth long has left her well
In the forest dark and cool:
She walks the city now,
Known to each knave and fool.

One pitying her, poor girl,
Furtively wipes a stain—
One slaps her on the back,
One leads her on a chain.

Her fresh and rosy blush
No longer shames the fiend:
For she can blush no more,
Her cheeks with rouge are stained.

And she is bought and sold
Like meat upon a stall;
"Progress" is the false coin
That she is bought withal.

Truth walks the city now;
She whom no man could find,
And no one dared deny,
Is seen—by all the blind.

WHY I LAUGH.

THROUGH England howling, late and soon,
Reformers bellow for the moon,
To me it seems small mystery;
I like her better in the sky.

Stumbling through ditches of the mind
They wander on, blind leading blind:
Sinners themselves, they yet must be
Picked guardians of morality.

I do not keep my brother like
Some men I know, who always strike
Upon your faults, yet stay content
To be even as they were sent.

I do not prettify my life,
Ere I dare look her in the face:
The jade! she makes a proper wife;
Methinks to love is no disgrace.

FEAR.

THERE is not a thing to fear
In the wide world round us here:
First we are born, and then we die,
Without knowing the reason why:

Between these two noteworthy events
We may climb to omnipotence,
Or sink downwards to the pit
Without losing the joy of it.

As long as hope remains deceiving,
So long we firmly cling to living:
And grimly fight for one last breath,
Anything being better than death.

Courage we do not need at all;
Were there no death, we should soon fade out;
There is not a thing to fear,
Nor a thing to be brave about.

THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER.

Life goes on,
Though it should not:
The poet sings,
Understood not!
I can die,
But I would not.

THE GOLDEN DEMON.

THE golden demon stept into my room,
And said: "Without me would be helpless gloom.
Thou knowest ease and lust and pain and tears:
Without me like mechanical cogs thy years
Would pass until the wheel, thy soul, had done
Its futile grinding-out beneath the sun.
Life would be but a tale of figures cast
For adding, washed away before the last
Meaningless integer were set unto
What went before, and thou couldst laugh anew,
Or ask, 'What did my toil accomplish here?
Nothing is added to my hope and fear.'
Next, without me no gleam of love or hope
Before thy eyes could glimmer while didst grope
About in life; a thing and not a man
Soullessly patient, wouldst thou fill thy span
With toil and sleep and food, unchanging three!
And all thy life would but a habit be.
Last, without me no thought could ever creep
Behind thy brow, to make it dream to leap
Through dreams of fame and power under the sun:
Save by my aid, genius is never won.
I know I am all-hateful in thy sight:
Remember, without me thou couldst not write!"

RECONCILIATION.

Already autumn! I had hoped at least
To keep ungnawed some moments of this year,
To save some fruit of song for autumn's feast:
But now I know that vain was this my care.

It matters little, if I further go:
Day is but altered twilight, joy half pain,
And frost must ripen fruit. Let it be so:
I shall not fight the battle over again.

With the dead leaves of all my old despairs,
I'll dance a wedding-round before I rest.
The wind will pipe me mad monotonous airs
Until the night comes, the black night at last.

WHAT THE WIND SANG.

THE broad trees shaken together in a great wind
Roar and murmur, laughing: "It is life, it is life":
The nodding flowers and grasses up the hillside
Sing together, steadily: "Birth and love":
But by the pond the little slender sedges
Low and thrilling whisper: "It is death."

TRUTH is so beautiful, I would not stir
To take her: 'tis apart I worship her.
Beauty is more than all the things to be,
I seek her ever: she despises me.
Justice is like the lightning from the sky,
It strikes the great oak first—I would not die.

Were real things as my dream, there were no dream
To veil in glorious lies Time's iron stream:
To make The Commonplace arise and dance,
And blind Fate's tearless eyes to all but Chance.

EVIL AND GOOD.

Long, long they fighting stood,
Evil and good:
Now the great war is done,
Each has the other slain,
Life, their fair prize, again
Stands in the sun.

Over the future deep
Floats now a song:
"Wake, ages, from your sleep
Time's hounds, give tongue:
On to the chase of life!
Nothing is wrong.

"Like to earth, air, and sea,
Let man be free:
Choose as you freely will,
Take either good or ill,
Death's blessing to the weak,
Life's to the strong!"

Nothing's wrong? Can I do
No evil, then?
Can no sin give me pain?
Can I not feel
To some old god untrue,
To an illusion false?
Silence, you tempting calls!
Bring back the past again!

I must create anew
Evil and good:
Puppets they are, 'tis true,
But I am bored:
Follies I long to do,
Some risk to take—
I might as well be
Cold as a snake.

Come to the battle, then!
Here is my all,
Backing Good's radiant brow:
If he do fall,
Straight to the other side
I will depart.
Are you quite ready?
The bell, then: we start!

THE MOTHER'S THOUGHT OF HER SON.

He will be kissing women
When I am old;
And he will betray a maiden
When I am cold.

His father was proud and fickle,
I yielded to his guile;
I faced the scorn of women
A long and weary while:

But silent grows your gossip,
For the case is altered now!
The hands that beat upon my breasts,
The lips they yielded to,

Shall plunder of your fairest,
And break your daughters' will.
So I revenge my anguish,
And so I triumph still:

With evil for evil taken,
An eye for every eye,
Contempt for your conventions,
Insult for injury!

And did you think, you women,
That I was weak as you?
Through conquering seed and fibre
My blood's exulting now!

He will be kissing women
When I am old;
And he will betray a maiden
When I am cold!

THE FATHER'S THOUGHT OF HIS DAUGHTER.

She will jilt a lover,
When gray is this head;
And lead a husband by the nose
When I am dead.

No toil shall ever stain her,
All pleasure shall she prove,
And cruelly spread 'round her
The old illusion, love.

For I was trapped and taken
Many a time, that way;
How easily can woman
Man's weakest trait betray!

You young men of the future,
She now shall show you all
What silly slaves of habit
You are, when instincts call:

Yes, she shall bear you captive
In chains of bitter rue,
To me, the only lover
Whose will she chose to do!

She will be jilting lovers,
When grey is this head;
And lead a husband by the nose
When I am dead.

THE IDIOT.

I AM London's idiot, see!
I live, though my brain has ceased to be:
A better fate than many a head
Which suffers, though its slave be dead:

Your London's made of bricks and coal:
My London grows within my soul.
Your London's grey, both day and night:
My London's yellow, pink, and white.

Within my body ever, God
Insatiably seeks His food:
Walls of my heart, hold firm and strong,
For He would make you yield to song.

God always dies upon the Cross:
Weary of gain, He longs for loss.
God always rises to die again:
Weary of loss, He longs for gain.

He is an Idiot, grey and grim,
He laughs, and I echo Him;
He weeps and I know His woe,
For He is Truth and Falsehood too.

FAILURE.

Some fail because they never chose to strive;
These, the impassive, smiling, sunlit gods:
Some fail because they strove too much to do;
These are the heroes, seed of Hercules:
Some fail because they stood self-filled apart;
These are the bards of deathless prophecy:

But I have failed,—for I reject success,—
Because success is the only failure I know:
Far better death or madness.

TO THOSE WHO FAIL.

All sculpture, every painting, every song,
Though it be weak or strong,
Cries but a single message to my mind:
"A dream I sought, a dream I could not find."

Out of the bonds of flesh man's soul desires to leap;
But anchored, grappled deep,
Bears yet the tedium of reality
For a vision wholly vain and but half free.

You lofty souls who fail,
Who win no fame nor joy from out this life,
But only dark days, nights devoid of rest,
Look at the favoured great! Among them all the best
Know only a barren toil, a futile strife,
They plow the sands, and tell a twice-told tale.

Soon will the earth grow cold:
Soon, soon, beneath the mould
Will your bones fall to dust;
And your works will fade and rust.
But when at last life, hope, and time are full,
Your lovely dream will live, all unapproachable!

THE ROCKET ASCENDING.

O STARS, you who rush through the night,
Look at me now in my flight!
Is there among you one
So loftily, carelessly thrown?
Strewing such mad sparks behind
As it rushes up on the wind?
Vast stars, I know you are great,
More constant than mine is your fate:
But I think you have never borne
The swift change from death to the strife
Of fire-breathing life,
Nor the rush as on burning wings
Out of mortal to deathless things,
From the earth to the skies forlorn.

So, if I fall at the last,
If the struggle is soon done and past,
Think not that I know despair.
You move free from time, space, and care:
I have assaulted the air.
More than you dared, did I dare.

THE ROCKET FALLING.

I FALL, I fall, I am all spent and foredone:
Downwards I swoop, dark from the top of my course:
I am ended ere I attain content or remorse:
Like life, I am finished ere I was planned or begun.

The dark earth receives me: but yet, ere around me flows,
After my sky-piercing song, the cold, silent sorrow of night,
I know yet one thought—one star-thought:—It is my delight
That triumphant, in a gold rain of glory, I rose.

MY CONFESSION.

O THE fools, the miserable footling fools,
The silly sentimental clan:
Who run to hide from naked life,
Who fear to face a man:
I am not now one of your lot,
Although I once began.

The Pharisee thanks God, at least,
For one thing in his life:
You who were bidden to the feast,
Complain of the noise and strife;
And in the back of the Wedding Guest
You slyly slip your knife.

I read my poems of long ago,
And my gorge rose in my throat.
It is to you such songs I owe;
That pretty, piping note,
That nevermore from me shall flow
For fools to doat and gloat.

Thank God, I am cured; and I did not rush
To print my teething pains!
Let me hide my good new light 'neath a bush:
Well out of your sloppy rains.
Someone may come to it from the crush,
If a living man remains.

RECRUDESCENCE.

Midwinter grim and grey
What do you bring me, pray?
" What, but a darker day,
A stormier night,
A bleak sleet-driven way,
No inn in sight! "

Then, winter, cease your shock:
I am no granite rock
To bear the strain.
"Although you cannot fight,
I'll leave you some small might
Until I come again."

Well, winter, start your task.
Be merciless: I ask
Only so much of you.
" I'll flay your soul, no fear,
So that the coming year
Must make you all anew."

SATIETY.

I've seen all to be seen,
Have known all to be known.
And everywhere I've been;
From the pit up to the throne.

In strength I reared my stones;
Life idly knocks them down:—
To shape, as it did once,
Another god—or clown?

Faded that dream, to be:
The past is burned away;
I leap into the sea . . .
It takes me. Life was gay.

THE TWO LEAVES.

To the leaf on the ground
Spake the leaf on the tree:—
Every summer I try
The more lovely to be:
'Tis a fatal illusion,
Which has the support
Of a million mad beings
Who think life is sport.
What myriads of leaves
Were born and have died
To fill but one tree:
To count have you tried?
Had there been but one leaf
In the wide world entire,
I might know no more grief,
Feel no more desire!
To a bright imperfection
Like thine I did grow:
Then naught else but decay
Could I do: so I go
To that peace where at peace
With all growth I shall be.
May the wind cast me soon
To the ground from the tree!

Said the leaf on the ground
To the leaf on the tree:—
Dost thou dream me more happy,
More perfect than thee?

Know that, whenever born
In this round-circling hell,
'Tis in vain to escape:
Here yet thou must dwell.
Behold my bright bliss!
By each breeze I am whirled;
I am trod underfoot;
In a heap I am hurled.
There rolling, I change:
And in earth shall you see
Me yet become sap,
And again mount the tree!
O agony vain!
Would now I could fly
Where matter is not,
In a black void on high!
There beyond death and life
To rest, nor to be
Any more upon earth,
A leaf of a tree!

WRITTEN ON THE TOP OF THE GREAT ST. BERNARD PASS.

MULTITUDES northward and southward, traverse
the dreary grey pass;
Carrying over invisibly burdens of sorrow and
care.
They meet, and they look at each other: they pass,
and they never return:
The road remains smooth and the mountains
frozen and bare.

WRITTEN AT THE GRANDE CHARTREUSE.

HAPPY are birds and beasts, water and trees.
They give us what they can of their own ease.
Unhappy alone is man. Upon this spot
I dreamed that I found bliss, but found it not.

ENGLAND AGAIN.

SACRED England, stagnant pool,
Haunt of every knave and fool:
We thy humble servants pray
That thou be thus for alway.

Gold alone maintains thy might,
Not vain justice, foolish right:
Gold alone feeds fading lust
Ere it falls to rot and dust.

Gold with hands both white and black,
Wrung from many a wretched back;
We now lay before thy feet,
Moral England, fat and sweet.

THE LAMP OF PARLIAMENT.

THE lamp of Parliament is like an eye
Which only sees at times, and then at night.
It lends its beams, a strange and tragic sight,
To silly bats and fuddled owls that fly,
Seeking the unreal through the fog's black blight,
Where stars are none nor tubes to see them by.
And so this lamp may plume itself on high;
With pompous pride and yellow lust made bright.

Bale-fire of England flaunting her black years,
Your reign is over: even slaves can see
The foreign shame, the misery, the tears
You make at home: extinguished shall you be,
And fade before the sacred fire of song:
For I am waking, I that slept so long.

AN ENGLISH NEWSPAPER.

(Adapted from Pushkin.)

Half-slaves and half-knaves and half-fools edit me:
And so, I am wholly a nonentity.

AFTER BREAKFASTING.

(Lines written in an Inn on the Great Saint Bernard Pass.)

NAPOLEON took his breakfast here,
And after rode afar:
Napoleon conquered Italy,
I wage internal war.

MARRIAGE.

He was a soaring pine-tree,
She an exploring vine.
They met: 'twas the old story;
The creeper choked the pine.

FROM THE DEPTHS.

Because it is ever night,
Because the fire is out,
Because I have fought my fight,
There rises the last doubt.

Because the crimson glow
Of my volcanic soul
Has only blazed to show
The fogs that round me roll:

Because I am nailed to my cross
Alone, nor hope to break
This dreary tale of loss;
Nor my sky-city make:

Because I am astray,
An exile from all lands
Set free to do and say
Nothing, I drop my hands;

I bow my head; the night
May take me if it will:
Longer I cannot fight.
At last my soul is still.

But yet, you mob abhorred
Of sty-engendered wits,
You shall not have my sword:
I stamp its blade to bits.

THE LAST JUDGMENT.

METHOUGHT I saw the final Judgment Day:
God woke from slumber, forth He swiftly thrust
His lightnings: earth and sea were burned away.
All souls arose, like a great cloud of dust.

Then from His all-enduring throne He spake:
"The honest bodies of beasts, I gladly bless.
I give to them, from ape to crawling snake,
Immortal lengths of bestial happiness.

"Man, man alone, half-body and half-soul,
Half-wise, half-fool, half-dawning and half-night,
Him I condemn, both separately and whole,
The bottomless abyss remove him from My sight!"

CONCLUSION.

See my hands bleed with toiling, and my eyes
Are weary with the sun upon the grain;
My body is naught but one great ache of pain:
Taskmaster, blind and idle, grant the prize,
Sleep that descends and never lifts again!

Unripe and thin are many of my sheaves:
Some are unbound and scattered wide, and some
The rats have gnawed: this is the harvest home;
But not for bygone folly my heart grieves.

The high and hollow winds brought down the frost:
Mayhap I dallied: idleness was bliss:
Or I was weak: at any rate, I lost:
Yet do I not repent me, even of this.

Let laughing gleaners find the ripest ears:
For me the sun is out, nor night holds care;
The open sky is full of steely stars,
I sup with death, and wrap me in despair.

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